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ABSTRACT

Although education professionals are major stakeholders in administrative reform, the emerging debate about administrator training has involved the elites--representatives of professional associations, leaders in large or rich districts, state regulators, colleges of education, and departments of educational administration. Previous literature reports little about administrators' interpretations of the issues engaging the elite. This paper discusses the results of a study exploring administrators' perceptions concerning their recruitment and training, their postcertification professional development, and the effectiveness of past and present training in preparing administrators to solve current and future problems. Self-administered questionnaires were mailed to 420 members of Oregon's professional association. The sample was stratified by region, district size, gender, and position. The response rate was 70 percent; 75 percent of respondents agreed to be contacted for face-to-face interviews. Most administrators felt ambivalent about formal schooling and wished they had more direct, hands-on training. Also, they felt that certification and professional development programs were offered at inconvenient times and often provided irrelevant training activities. The data on Oregon's school administrators reflects consensus on attitudes, but describes enormous variation in individual and organizational experiences not attributable to demographic differences. Some speculative impressions concerning these variations are presented. (30 references) (MLH)

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THE ADMINISTRATOR'S VIEW OF ADMINISTRATIVE TRAINING

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Paper Presented at the Annual Meetings of the
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Introduction

In Leaders for America's Schools, the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (1987) called for a re-examination and transformation of programs for school administrator preparation. This theme was repeated by one of the report's authors, Daniel Griffiths, in a separate piece entitled "Educational Administration: Reform PDQ or RIP" (1988) and by a subcomittee of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (Shibles, 1988). These reports followed the calls for teacher training reform coming from other national commissions in The Nation at Risk (1983), A Nation Prepared (Carnegie Commission, 1986), and Tomorrow's Teachers (1986). Like these more famous groups, the National Commission represents a blue-ribbon panel of educational policy-makers, outstanding administrators, and professors and deans at well-established colleges of education. The report claims that recruitment strategies, the content of programs, and licensure requirements are inadequate, outdated, and haphazard rather than clearly thought out by participants (pp. xvi-xvii). Its authors call for more rigor in defining programs and for greater cooperation between universities, school districts, and professional associations. While Leaders for America's Schools may be overly harsh in its critique and too sweeping in its recommendations, it raises issues that most educators--both in the schools and in the universities--have found troubling over the past decade.

Beyond the rhetoric, analyses of both administrative training and administrative roles have been conducted by academic researchers. Much of recent research has attempted to bridge the gaps between effective schools, educational leadership, and management training. Generally, the research has suggested that while there are few "rules" for effective school leadership, successful administrators--especially at the building level where most studies have been conducted--practice an art rather than a science. Most good schools appear to be led by principals with a sense of purpose and vision, an understanding of the human factor in organizations, and an ability to communicate. However, Blumberg and Greenfield (1986) discovered few common personality or behavioral characteristics among the eight "excellent" principals they studied in the mid-1970's, although they noted that these principals did share a proactive stance towards potential and actual problems. Specifically technical skills taught in credentialling programs--budgeting, law, facilities, and even supervision and personnel evaluation--seem to be far less important than "leadership" ability. There is less consensus about the importance of instructional skill and knowledge, although many researchers and practitioners emphasize principal's "instructional leadership" function. While principals with outstanding teaching ability can and do utilize this skill in administration, there is little evidence that it is either necessary or sufficient for effective school leadership. Most critics have agreed that there seems to be a poor match between classroom experiences--didactic teaching of conceptual topics--and what administrators need to know and what they actually do. Correspondingly, these critics

have stressed the utility of practica, internships, and mentorships as core components of administrative training.

These concerns reflect a broader symbolic context. Researchers on organizations have been unable to demonstrate that administration is a science. In recent years influential scholars have begun to generate consensus that organizational studies is "multiparadigmatic" and that successful managers can--and perhaps must--shift their perceptions and behaviors from "frame to frame" (Bolman and Deal, 1983: Morgan, 1985). It is not entirely surprising then that administrative ***training*** appears fragmented and unsystematic and that an orderly and comprehensible sequencing of courses, for instance, is rare. Training in educational administration shares these ambiguities with management training in MBA programs where critiques of the separation between "theory" and "practice" resemble those heard in education (Behrman and Levin, 1984; Mulligan, 1987).

Perhaps even more important, administrative training represents an ongoing battle for "turf" between practitioners and research oriented colleges of education. The former control the job market, especially entry, and the content of credentialling courses they teach, while the latter control the advanced degrees administrators need for maximum career advancement and the selection of regular and adjunct faculty who teach in credentially programs. This tension is natural, inevitable, and perhaps even productive, for training and certification. It creates special stresses when, as at present, educational resources are dwindling and calls for efficiency and reform are widespread and shrill. Moreover--and we think this is extremely significant--**both** school administrators and professors of educational administration are engaged in a "professionalization project." Larson (1977), who coined this term in her study of the development of medicine's professional autonomy and power, describes it as a collective effort to enhance an occupational group's status by representing its knowledge base as rational, sophisticated, and difficult to access. Ironically, teaching seems to have a more advanced knowledge base than administration.

Thus, educational professionals are major stakeholders in administrative reform. It promises--or threatens--to alter public perceptions of administrators and education professors as well as worklives on a day-to-day basis. So far, the emerging debate about administrative training has involved the elites--representatives of professional associations, leaders in large or rich districts, state regulators, leaders of colleges of education and departments of educational adminsitration. Are their concerns shared by rank-and-file administrators, by new administrators with recent certificates?

Previous literature reports little about administrators' interpretations of the issues that have so engaged the field's elite. How have administrators been recruited and trained? How do they manage their post-certification professional development? What would they change if they could start over? What do they recommend for young administrators or potential administrators? And finally, how closely does past and present administrative training prepare school officials for current and future problems. What current administrators think is important, for they are role models, recruiters of potential new administrators, supervisors of internships, and participants in ongoing professional development courses, seminars, and workshops offered by universities, professonal associations, and consultants. If changes in administrative preparation are to be implemented at the district level, the current generation of school administrators will have to be change agents.

Finally, are there significant differences between rural and urban administrators, and among the latter, between those in large and small districts and schools? How do

building-based and district based administrators differ in their perceptions? Older and younger administrators? Women and men? Wirt and Kirst (1982) argue that education, and the tasks of educational administrators, has changed dramatically over the past quarter century. No one dissents. In this paper we explore these issues using data from a study of school administrators in Oregon.

The Oregon Study

Oregon is typical of those small and medium-size states with agricultural and natural resource-based economies and a geographic, economic, and cognition split between its major metropolis and the small cities and rural areas elsewhere. Funding of K-2 education has been relatively generous but, owing to heavy dependence (50%) on local property taxes and little statewide equalization, quite uneven with obviously "rich" and "poor" districts scattered throughout the state. There has never been major school finance reform, and districts can, and do, close when local voters repeatedly turn down operating levies. Financial issues are a persistent worry for administrators, although the problems of coping with the educational consequences of social disorganization are less extreme, even in Portland and in those rural areas with poor and/or transient populations, that has been experienced elsewhere in the nation. Careers in education still attract college graduates and, except in remote rural areas, there are many qualified candidates for each job opening.

Three universities do most of the state's administrative training, granting basic and standard principal certificates and basic and standard superintendent certificates. Portland State University and Lewis and Clark, a small private university, enroll most of students from the Portland metropolitan area; the University of Oregon, located 110 miles to the south, enrolls the remainder, many of them through courses taught in off-campus locations and during summer sessions. The great majority of students attend only part-time, usually one course per quarter, and work as fulltime teachers and administrators. Only Lewis and Clark has a cohort-based program, while at the two state schools students enter programs and sequence courses at their own pace. As elsewhere, programs of school administrative training in Oregon are continually evolving. The two most recent major changes have involved tripling (from 67 to 201 hours) the administrative internship requirement (at both the principal and superintendent levels) and the increased popularity of "Assessment Centers" for administrative selection and training (Dickson, 1987). Initiative for the latter effort has come from the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators (COSA). In 1987, that program was strengthened by "Project Lead" funds from the U.S. Department of Education. The research reported here, supported in part by that grant, has been designed to provide baseline data for leadership training activities and to remedy our very incomplete knowledge of how current administrators actually have been trained and what they see as priorities for training new administrators and for their own continuing professional development.

To investigate school's administrators' views, we mailed self-administered eight-page questionnaires to 420 members of the state's professional association, stratifying the sample by region, district size, gender, and position (superintendent, elementary and secondary principals and vice-principals, and other supervisors. As 95 percent of currently employed administrators belong to the association, no effort was made to survey non-members. Questionnaires were divided into five sections: biographic data, barriers to administrative effectiveness, individual job characteristics, district problems, and professional development. After follow-up we received 319 (70 percent) returned questionnaires. The responding administrators proportionatly reflected our sampling strata. Table 1 presents sample characteristics.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Seventy-five percent of respondents agreed to be contacted for subsequent face-to-face interviews. Eventually, we successfully scheduled 141 administrators, using as interviews both project staff and a cadre of retired administrators who were trained by project directors in a one-day session. The nineteen question interview took between one-and-a-half and two hours to complete, and encouraged respondents to reflect on their careers. We asked administrators to detail major influences in their administrative careers, to identify key skills and where and how they did or did not acquire them, and to evaluate past and present administrative training programs. Our discussion in this paper uses both these interviews and questionnaire results.

Questionnaire data were analyzed statistically on a mainframe computer. The sample size permitted us to employ multivariate statistics and to use factor analysis to verify relationships between conceptually developed scales for leadership impact, organizational and interpersonal stress, and district environmental context. Specific questionnaire items taken from previous NAASP and AASE national surveys (Byrne, et al., 1978; Cunningham, 1987; Knezevich, 1971; Valentine, et al, 1981), but we revised and modified to make them internally consistent and to address topical issues. For the interview instrument, we employed general questions from these earlier national studies, but attempted to generate open-ended questions that would allow responding administrators maximum opportunity for self-expression. Interviewers were instructed to take notes question-by-question and to take time after the interview to prepare a legible, complete copy. Several interviewers used tape recorders to assist them in this task. Answers, and accompanying demographic data, typed into a format for use with ASK-SAM, a boolean logic text-analysis program developed for the IBM Personal Computer.

Results and Discussion I: What Makes an Educational Leader?

What are administrators saying? Interview responses are intriguing, telling more perhaps about administrative function than about administrative training. The research literature is rife with deep discussions about the nature of administrative leadership. Compare for instance the two dimensional task-socioemotional leadership of Blake and Mouton (1978) and others with the four "frames" of Bolman and Deal (1984) and Hersey and Blanchard (1982). Compare both approaches with Fiedler's (1967) contingency theory of leadership or Cuban's (1976) characterization of four types of school leadership. Taken as a whole, research findings in the organizational and social psychology of leadership are inconclusive if not downright contradictory. School leaders are very clear in their assessment of their profession's leadership needs, coming down clearly on the human resources side of the fence.

We asked our sample two questions bearing specifically on these issues: "what skills and personal characteristics will be most important to future administrative leaders?" and "what are the key behaviors of an effective instructional leader?" While many responses were rambling, over 80 percent of of those interviewed mentioned "human relations" or "communications" skills. Two typical, frequently repeated themes: "human relations skills, especially flexibility in dealing with issues in a rapidly changing world" [male high school principal]and "people skills will be absolutely essential. Parents are more interested in school . . . Ability to work with parents and staff, especially the latter" [male junior high principal]. The expression of concern for working with people was a recurring theme in virtually every interview.

Particularly interesting was to **whom** administrators felt they had to relate. Their predominant concern was with staff rather than with children, parents, administrative superiors, or the public. Some examples: "teachers are used to managing students, while administrators must be able to manage adults" [elementary principal]. "Good vision with defined goals and ability to lead staff towards them [is] essential" [assistant superintendent]. Finally, "ability to nurture both staff and students in the learning experience" [elementary principal]. Parents were mentioned rather rarely--only 12 of the 141 respondants talked about dealing with parents--and the content of most comments about students was general and rhetorical. For instance: "happy teachers make happy kids" [male junior high principal], "you must love your job and working with kids and people" [male elementary principal], and "encourage climate that school is for kids' learning" [female assistant superintendent].

Responses mentioning communication convey much the same impression. For many administrators communication skills rank with formal qualifications: administrators need "finance, organization/planning, communications skills" [male junior high principal] and "intellectual, technical, and communications skills"[female junior high principal]. Communications skills are concrete and multifaceted. One female high school vice-principal described skills of conflict resolution and communication: speaking, listening, writing, feeling . . ." A male counterpart mentioned specifically "listening, speaking, interpreting, writing, analyzing." However, administrators generally seem not to see communications skills as a set of techniques or tools and a process that moves information from them to others. Fully a third of the respondants mentioned listening as a component of communication, and many had clearly given this issue some thought: "[be an] interpretor of communication" [intermediate education district superintendant] and "listen with meaning".

The interview protacols surprised us because each seemed similar, almost identical, to both the last and the next one we read. If we can't demonstrate commonality of attitude and behavior, certainly we found commonality of rhetoric about what it takes and will take to be a successful administrator. Two comparisons qualify and attentuate the general picture. Young administrators, those under 40, gave very similar answers. Sixteen of the 18 we interviewed repeated the communications-human relations theme in one form or another. This emphasis was shared by a lower proportion of the older generation, that is administrators over 50. In this group 11 of the 37 we talked to made no mention whatever of human relations skills, stressing rather the importance of flexibility or technical skills such as computers or fiscal management. This may be less a generational difference, however, than a reflection of variance in responsibilities. With only three exceptions, young administrators worked at the building level as principals or vice principals. By contrast, half the old farts were district-level administrators and perhaps buffered from the constant contact with students, teachers, and parents that characterizes their building-based colleagues. We might speculate that older administrators have become sufficiently skilled in human relations, or at least comfortable enough with how they handle their own human relations, that they take that skill more-or-less for granted. (Or perhaps only the survivors are left.) Certainly training programs ten or twenty years ago put less emphasis on communications-human relations than more recent curricula. The data are consistent with this speculation but are not strong enough to provide much real support. A recent study of Oregon superintendants reveals few differences in job orientation between older and younger occupants of the position (Redmond, 1987).

No other group comparison on responses to these two questions shows even the small differences noted above. Interpersonal and communications skills are as important in large as in small districts--or as important in small as in large ones. There

appear to be no major differences between men and women, and generally none between building and district administrators, or between those in elementary and those in secondary schools. Other skills are mentioned by many respondents, but no single one stands out either numerically or by emphasis.

Reviewing these comments in light of the leadership literature allows some interesting interpretations. Little in the interviews, in these or other questions deals with the structural frame. Rules, procedures, organization charts and the like seem not to be a source of concern or interest, neither helping nor hindering administrative function. Rules are doubtless part of the taken-for-granted reality, but their is little mention of administrative red-tape, of concerns that staff or students aren't taking rules seriously, or any indication that administrators rules or structure can improve education. One exception is administrators' belief that present and future colleagues must be sufficiently familiar with school law to avoid grievances and litigation. "Be aware of legal implications when dealing with staff personnel issues" [an elementary principal]. Unlike district or building policies, school law is part of the environmental context, and something over which local administrators have no control.

Administrator perceptions about the importance of communcations and interpersonal awareness suggests they are closely attuned to the "human relations" or "socio-emotional" aspect of management identified by social psychologists 40 years ago. Reliance on staff motivation, appreciation of the complex interactive nature of teaching and other educational activities, and awareness of the potential benefits of staff development are apparent reasons for this emphasis. Many administrators have much more contact with teachers than with children. Moreover, because many teachers are permanent employees, administrators must develop a comfortable, long term relationship with them. This suggests that for administrators this relationship is problematic and continues to be the locus of ongoing tensions between bureaucratic and professional orientations long identified in the literature (Lortie, 1975; Hanson, 1985). Because of this uneasiness, administrators' identification of human relations reflects a political orientation as well. Teachers, and their performance and commitment levels, and especialy where there are problems, may be a more salient aspect of the Oregon administrators' environment than we see usually in the literature. As a final note on leadership frames, we can note that the rhetoric of school administration reveals little about the "symbolic" frame that has been a popular theme of academic and popular treatments of leadership in the 1980's. An exception: "good vision with defined goals and ability to lead staff towards them [is] essential. Management skills are not enough." Only a half dozen administrators used such terms as "goals," "mission," or "vision" as necessary qualities of future leaders, although many more used similar expressions while answering other questions.

Results and Discussion II: Administrative Training

Given administrators' beliefs about necessary leadership qualities, how do they see the match between training programs and the realities of administrative life? We asked three questions specifically about training: "Were any particular courses, workships or other training programs particularly helpful in training you as an administrators?" " If you could redesign your own formal and informal education and training as an administrator, what would you do differently?" "How can the professional associations and the universities help future school administrators?" Administrators old and young had sharp memories of their academic training and could recall specific courses. Courses most often mentioned as making contributions to developing adminsitrative skills were school law, human resource management, clinical supervision, personnel evaluation courses, clinical supervision, school finance. Specific

workshops freqeuntly noted include ITIP, executive leadership, and simulated decision-making. However, none of these programs or courses were noted by even one-sixth of the respondents. There were no substantial differences between the three university programs and few, if any discernable differences, for younger or older administrators. While most administrators were non-evaulative in answering this question, the following quote was not entirely atypical: "I received an administrative credential and none of the courses have been helpful . . .COSA's leadership programs were helpful for the first year." We see in many responses a pronounced preference for short, intense, practical workshops rather than the traditional coursework that dominates certification programs. Moreover, internships and practica are rated very highly: "I went through the U. of O. internship program and I felt I came out of that much beter prepared . . . because I had hands-on experience alot of people didn't."

This emphasis, and especially the ambivalence towards formal schooling is reflected in administrators' thoughts about how, if they could turn back the clock, to redesign their training. Most wish they had had more direct, hands-on training. "I would take courses that were more practical and designed to direct needs. I would recommend working with a mentor for a short time" [central office administrator]. "I would like to have had the ability to observe and discuss with someone identified as a very successful administrator" [IED Superintendant]. In recommending administative career choices to subordinates, several respondents stressed the importance of prior understanding of what such a career involves. Typical comments: "research what kind of administrator you really want to become before you start your educational training" and "determine if administrative responsibility is what you really want before you 'jump' into an administrative program." One high school principal recommended finding a "university with a graduate program in school administration which blended 'practical' down-to-earth courses with good philosophical/theoretical courses and spend a year attending same." He was an exception.

In assessing potential contributions to administrative training, a majority of respondents, while obviously ambivalent about higher education's role, see a symbiotic relationship between the universities and the professional association. "COSA can continue with inservices [and] design effective inservices on timely topics. [The universities] can offer courses on things most needed by administrators: collective bargaining, contract management, etc." And, "I think they are doing now is correct. [The universities] are educating them to become administrators and COSA is helping to hone their skills. [The universities need to have] stronger requirements in communications skills such as writing." Finally, COSA . . . should continue by continually assessing administrators' needs and helping to meet those needs. . .Bring experts together with administrators to share ideas, problems, plans. U. of O's biggest contribution could be effective research and cooperative programs with school districts." Administrators believe that the professional association should help identify prospective administrators, provide special assistance to new administrators, and those in smaller or more remote areas believe that more service should be provided outside the Willamette Valley population belt. While no specific question was directed to the local district's role, it is significant that none of the respondants indicated that districts should play a role in the administrative training process.

In the view of these administrators, the packaging and delivery of certification and professional development programs suffers from market mismatches. Certification courses attuned to the academic calendar (semesters or quarters) and those offered on college campuses are less attractive than weekend or summer courses and those brought to communities or districts. Most current administrators, at least, see continuing education as an inconvenience, perhaps even a necessary evil, and do not

express much commitment to the type of week-by-week knowledge and skill building that research indicates is most effective at all educational levels. In this state, as elsewhere, the system assumes that that administrative training and working in education are compatible. They may not be. Moreover, while there is an obvious and long-standing tension between practitioners and academics--just as there is frequently between theory and practice--this reality understates dilemmas of status inherent in administrative training. Practicing administrators upgrading their certificates or pursuing doctoral degrees are forced into dependency relationships with college professors who evaluate their work and judge their progress, often using criteria that are vague by administrative standards. The professors, even those with past administrative experience, will know less about many aspects of school activities than their students--and both faculty and students know this. That courses are legally required for certificates, and often seen as low on administrators personal priorities, exacerbates negative attitudes. Finally, administrators are more likely to recall problems for which their training did **not** prepare them than those that did, and remember courses and activities in classrooms that never proved useful.

The data support the impression that administrators see themselves as a practical lot, valuing experience very highly. Those mentioning their own internship, for instance, valued it highly. They stress that educational administration professors should have recent public school experience and that more courses should be taught by practitioners. They want courses on practical matters, but indicate they learn more from reading about innovation and exemplary practice as they do from courses or workshops. Many respondents want the universities to screen applicants at entry and at completion, implying some dissatisfaction with products, if not with processes. However, administrators and higher education have a relationship that is simultaneously symbiotic and competitive. Both school administrators and administration professors are attempting to develop, synthesize, and transmit systematic knowledge about administrative processes in education. Both seek legitimacy from one another and from other significant stakeholders. Members of both groups resent state regulators preference for the formal, often inflexible, regulations rather than for the substance. At the same time they battle one another for turf and for symbolic recognition.

The data on Oregon's school administrators reflects consensus on attitudes, but describes enormous variation in individual and organizational experiences. Demographic differences do not explain experiential differences, and with similarity of attitude across administrators of differing ages, positions, genders, and districts, our portrait seems vague and blurry. However, we can (and will) speculate, hoping that research by others or our own additional work with this large body of data will shed some light on our speculations. Some speculative impressions: (1) there is no typical career path or career strategy current administrators have taken; (2) differences between administrators in large and small districts and between central office and building administration are probably significant in how they affect day-to-day administrative life, but are hard to find; however, superintendents enjoy--in both senses of the word--greater autonomy than their lesser peers; (3) there is an occupational culture, complete with rhetoric and symbols stressing optimism and personal efficacy, shared by many, perhaps most administrators; (4) certification requirements and programs standardize training and subsequent professional development on paper only; they are not experienced in even a remotely common fashion; (5) most administrators are skeptical--but not entirely negative--about what universitie offer them, but it is possible that part of this attitude derives from the dependency relationship implied in taking courses on foreign ground; (6) the certification "system"--and training generally--serves largely a

symbolic function, providing legitimacy for a system that is loosely coupled at the state level and routinely idiosyncratic at the local level.

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